

Fire Cult of the Ancient Tamils

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1.1. Introduction: Much has been written about the Religion, Gods, Goddesses and rituals of the ancient Tamils, but, there are few studies about different cults existed during the earliest times. It may be interesting to know about the existence of the cult of the Sun, Moon, Fire, Mountain, Tree, Water etc as natural elements; Sur, Anangu, Pavai, Surara Magalir, Varaiyara Magalir, Vanara Magalir, Oru mulai arutta Tiruma Unii, Salini, Pattini etc in anthromorphic forms; Ram, cattle, Cock, wall-lizard, snake etc in theriomorphic forms and so on. However, as the fire-cult is one of the earliest forms of religion of any society, a study of it reveals many interesting details in historical perspective. How the cult originated, developed, established, associated with other cults and worship, incorporated and finally converted to other forms are analyzed and discussed based on the ancient Tamil literature, popularly known as “Sangam literature”. Only Tolkappiyam (not falling under the category of Sangam literature), Pattuppattu and Ettuttogai (generally accepted by all as Sangam literature) are taken for study as it covers the history of Tamils up to few centuries of the current era¹. The anthropological evidence about fire goes back to megalithic and Neolithic periods (c. 2500 BCE and before). Epigraphical and Iconographic evidences belong to later period after first few centuries.

1.2. Importance of fire: Fire has been an important factor, occupying almost all aspects of life, perhaps, from birth to death of man and even beyond. For man, fire is fear, all-pervading, adorable, effulgent, purifying, affecting, curing, life-producing, creator and destroyer. Man must have experienced, enjoyed, suffered and understood these characters of fire, as his immediate encounter has been the forms of Sun, Moon, lightning, volcano, forest fire and of course, his own produced fire. All such experiences with the psychological processes with fire must have led him to start respecting, venerating and worshipping. The wide usage of fire for domestic, technical, religious and other secular purposes shows its ready availability i.e., instant production of it by any mechanical, or chemical process as found in the case of fire-stick, fire-stone or match-stock.

2. The expressions used for fire in the ancient Tamil literature: Ti (general term), Eri (burning fire), Teral (fire, heat), Tanal (live coal), Kolli (fire-brand), Kanal (live-coal, heat), Kanali (of that type), Neruppu (general term), Sudar (single uniform flame), Tazhal (ember), Azhal, Gnelli (produced by bamboo), Gnezhili (fire-brand), Imam (pyre), Vilakku (lamp), Alar (of spreading nature), Kadir (rays), are the words used to indicate fire of different nature. Alari, Kanthal, Vengai, Ambal, Kuvalai (all flowers), Vanni, Kuvilam, Vengai (trees); Erikkodi, Valli (creepers); Gnayiru (Moon), Kodi (Flaming); Ahuti (sacred fire of yagna), Sudu (heat, fire), Velvi (yagna), Kalavelvi (yagna of battle-field), Vettu (perform yagna) are used to denote indirectly, because of their nature, property,

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appearance, colour, form and association with fire. Another important fact is that each of the above expressions has an alternative meaning denoting a red or bright star (semmeen) and the Red planet (Mars-Sevvai) proving not only the origin of Solar system, but also the knowledge of man relating them.

3. **Fire and Domestic use:** The significance of domestic application of fire is noted in the different expressions used. The cooking fire is characteristically mentioned by the usual words (as noted above – Puram.20:7-9; Agam.172:13; 237:9). Vayitrutti is used to signify the stomach fire; Kavalti for protection; Kamatti to denote lust and so on. Fire used for lightning is known with different names. Even lamps used for such purpose are known characteristically depending upon the size, shape and use – Vilakku (lamp), Vilakkam (bigger size lamp), Tipam (lamp used for other purposes), Nantha vilakku (continuously burning lamp), Madattoller (fire kept at the place of chief or king), Ima vilakku (lamps or fire kept at crematory grounds), Tundu (lamps requires trimming), Sudar (lamp with uniform-single flame), Kadir (lam with rays), Agal (earthen lamp), Tagazhi (the bowl of a lamp), Pandali (made of metal), Pavai vilakku (metal lamp in the form of woman carrying a lamp in hands). Fire is produced by the fire-drill and kept blowing through a tube (Perum.178-79). Fire is also kept by Parppar, Andanar and the like for sacrificial purposes (Puram.2:23; Pari.5:42; Kali.69:5).

4. **Fire and Technology:** For the manufacture of different types of ceramic ware, big kilns were arranged and fired (Puram.228:2-4); Agam.308:6). Different burial and crematory urns were manufactured. Kaveripumpattinam excavations prove the usage of bricks supported by literary evidences. The excellent ferrous and non-ferrous implements found at different sites prove the knowledge of material science and processes like smelting, casting, wire-drawing and treat treatment (Puram.21:7-8). Other metal work and jewelry manufacture also support the fact. The occurrence of quartz, glass and other beads with fine holes and colours prove the usage of temperature of the order of 1350-1500°C. The ferrous and non-ferrous technology also requires the same range of temperature. All these literary and archaeological evidences prove the metallurgical skill of the ancient Tamils with the appropriate usage of fire in the applied technology.

5. **Fire and Fire-god:** Tolkappiyam gives direct reference to fire-worship. The specific expressions used are Kodinilai, Kandazhi and Valli (Porul.Purattitai.88) to denote the existence of worship in three forms – the Sun in the sky, Fire on the earth and the Moon in the waters. This resembles Rigvedic description about the presence of fire in three forms : terrestrial – agni; celestial – Indira and Solar – Sun, Mutti – three fires. Panchagniis also implied in Paditruppattu (14:1-4). After mentioning the four natural elements earth, water, ether and air, five types of fire are mentioned as : star, lightning, moon, Sun and fire. There is a possibility that the word “Deivam” directly denotes Fire-god as both roots Tevu and Te connote destruction and fire as explained:

1. tevu + am = destroy + nature of = destroyer.

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2. ta + i + am = Fire + God + of nature = Fire-god.

This is also supported by the following references, in which the nature of Fire-god is succinctly brought out:

Teral arum kadavul (Agam.396:7-8) = Fiery unique God.

Arum teral marabir kadvul (Agam.372:1) = unique-fiery-traditional God.

Teral aru marabin kadavyl (Agam.13:3) = Fiewry-unique-traditional God.

Teral arum kadavul (Natri.189:3) = Fiery-unique God.

In all these references, the God is worshipped, prayed and invoked; vow / oath taken before him (as a witness).

6. **Taking Oath before fire by a lover:** It is described as to how the raising fire invites pouring ghee in it, so the lover is eager to accept the lady-love for marriage. Thus, he informs the messenger implying that he is prepared to marry her with sacraments before the kindled fire raised by ghee (Kurun.106:5-6). The lover takes vow before “Teral arum kadavul (Agam.396:7-8) = Fiery-unique God” and promises holding her hand that he would not forsake / desert her. Some commentators suggest that the God mentioned here is Shiva, but there was no practice of taking oath / vow before Shiva, in fact, the name “Shiva” is not at all found in the ancient Tamil literature². There is also a reference about going around the fire, just like swans going round a pond (Kali.69:5).

7. **Fire and Marriage:** The above mentioned reference of going round fire by couple definitely denotes the marriage ceremony. Another ancient practice is the sacred marriage of the fire-god with a virgin symbolically. It is indirectly referred to in the commentary of Naccinarkkiniyar (8th cent.CE) to Tolkappiyam. After marriage, the groom is advised not to have union for three days, as they are meant for the gods of Moon, Kandharvar (Sun?) and Angi (Agni). In mythology, the custom of leading a bride round the fire, marrying symbolically to fire-god and her illusory union with fire-god denote fertility charm, union of man and woman, the role of fire or heat energy placed in conception and the chastity status of woman. Fire stands as a witness along with the other four elements in all such union. The “Agni satchi” (fire as witness) ritual has been so intimate with the Tamil culture and tradition.

8. **Fire and Pregnancy:** Mention has already been made about the symbolic marriage and union with fire by woman. The pregnant ladies worship God (Madurai.610). Natrinai explains about the smoke deposited on the body of a woman, who has delivered a child (Nat.380:1-5). Iyavai pugai i.e, the smoke produced by a special mixture of white mustard, ghee etc., is applied to pregnant woman and as well as newly born baby to drive away evil spirits and clean the house / place (agam.98:15). There is also a practice that the vessels of Murugan temple should not be touched by virgins and pregnant women (Puram.279:6-7), as the God might affect them. In fact, Velan (the priest) of Veriyadal always declares that the lady-love / virgin has been affected by Murugu / Murugan. In

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the evolution of Karttikeya / Muruga myth Sanskrit references also mention that the pregnant ladies would be affected by him. The goddesses Jara, Jataharini, Hariti and Ayohi associated with Muruga / Karttikeya-Skanda affect pregnant ladies by destroying fetus from the embryos. Here, the fiery goddesses Anangu and Sur affect them. All these details are discussed below.

9. **Fire and Death:** the dead are cremated in accordance with the principle of consigning body created by the fire i.e, by the union of man and woman. Definitely, the cremation must have been the most popular custom of the followers of fire-cult and influenced others also. Thus, we find post-crematory burials in urns (Puram.256:5). There has been one category of urn known as “Imattazhi” i.e, urn used for burial after cremation. Such Sarcophaguses (literally meaning “flesh eaters”) are in the form of Ram and elephant, the vahanas of Fire-god and Muruga (Seyon).

10. **The Principle of Five Elements (Panchabhuta tatva):** the five elements earth, water, air, ether and fire have been mentioned at different places (Padit.14:1-4; 24:15; Puram.2:1-6; Madu.453-54). The relation between them is also explained: Earth is conglomeration of soil; sky is connected with earth; wind is produced in the sky; fire is from wind and water from fire (Puram.2:1-6). The relation between body, life and growth with earth, water and food is also explained: As the human body depends on water, giving food amounts to giving life, because body is primarily based on food. Food is nothing but water in association with land (earth). One who combines water and land into one is God and the combination is “Unavin pindam” i.e, the body is considered as food, as it grows with the intake of food (Puram.18:19-23, 186:1-4). Of course, without fire, the food cannot be digested, hence it is mentioned as “Vayitrutti” (stomach fire) [Agam.74:5; Padit.20:26]. Without air, life cannot last. This is the Panchabhuta tatva, connecting the five natural elements with the creation of five senses of human body and hence man himself. Therefore, if a man dies, it is quite natural to think that his body should go back to the five natural elements quickly. For that, fire helps in cremation. In temple worship also, it has been faithfully incorporated.

11. **Sati and Fire:** Sati is the practice of woman entering into fire along with the dead body of her husband. Many of the chaste women of the ancient Tamizhagam have performed Sati. The literature abundantly gives references about it³. As the marriage and union take place in front of and with fire, perhaps, it was a way for them to unite with their counterparts in death also through fire. In fact, they have been characteristically mentioned as “Eri pugu Magalir” (Ingu.Tani) i.e, ladies ready to enter fire or entering fire. Perungoppendu, while performing sati says that the pond with full of blossomed lotus flowers and cool waters, and the pyre with flames are one and the same to her (Puram.246:11-15). Fire-walking must have been a reminiscent practice of reduced form of sati, where fire is raised under identical situation and conditions, in which women participate, even today in large numbers.

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12. **Fire and Arunthathi:** The star represented by Arunthathi and Arunthathi herself have been held in esteem by the ancient Tamils as hallmark of chastity. The bright Red star “Arunthathi” is seen by the bride during marriage, used for counting days and exalted for her nature of chastity (Padit.89:18-20). The chastity of her is incomparable (Padit.65:9). Here, she is mentioned as “Kamara kadavul” i.e, the Goddess who makes “Kamam” (lust) or Manmadan (equivalent to “Cupid”) fear. In fact, the virtue chastity is like fire. That is why virgin and married women pray God with fire i.e, lightning lamps as a form of ‘vestal fire’. Of the seven divine women of the sky, the Reddish star (represented by Arunthathi) is considered the most chaste lady (Padit.31:26-28), because when the wife of Agni, Swaha tried to assume the forms of the wives of Saptarishis (the Seven Sages), she could not succeed in the case of Salini i.e, Arunthathi (Pari.5:44). She, with her chastity occupying the highest position in the divine world, appears bright in the dark (Ingu.442:3-4). Here, the name Arunthathi is specifically mentioned, in other places, ‘Semmeen’ (Red star) and ‘Vadameen’ (Northern star) are used to denote her fiery chaste character and the northern direction⁴.

13. **Fire and Women:** Fire, chastity and divinity are closely related, connected and unfied to different goddesses-worship, Mother goddess-worship and Pattini-worship. Chastity is the prime virtue of a woman, that protects not only her, but also her husband for a woman, iot is like a fire, and compared with divinity (Agam.16:18, 184:1, 314:15; Ingu.76:4; Padit.5:4, 65:9). Women, married and unmarried women light, keep and trim lamps always (Mullai.47-50; Kurinchi.224-25; Pattina.246-48). “Pavai vilakku” is a lamp in the form of woman holding a lamp in her hands (Mullai.85; Nedunal.101-104). In the episode of Perungoppendu, all factors are brought: she declares that she is not afraid of the fire (pyre), as for her the pond with blossomed lotus flowers and cool waters, and the pyre with flames are one and the same. As a chaste lady, she does not want to live after the death of her husband following ‘Kaimmai’; Elephants bring dry fire-wood; ‘Kanavar’ (forest-dwellers) produce fire with fire-drill; the pyre is made in front of a remple of goddess (Anangu); she looks towards the crematory grounds, where her husband was cremated and walks to the pyre. Thus, satisfying all the required conditions, she is elevated to the position of Goddess.

14. **Fire and Ram:** Interestingly, the relation between Fire and Ram is brought out in the ancient Tamil literature. The Ram with its habitual shaking head protects the kindled fire in the cavity of the wood produced with a drill, later it is raised with dry wood (Agam.274:4-5). The fire-drill is kept inside a leather bag carefully (Natri.142:3). The protection of fire by Ram or goat’s leather is very significant. Perhaps, the nature of Ram’s leather used for keeping fire-drill safely, during rainy seasons and ram’s fur protecting it, must have been faithfully observed and recorded. Later, when fire was personified and deified, ram made the vehicle (Vahana) of him. There is one poem in Purananuru, which succinctly explains the relation astronomically between the fiery star Krittika (Pleiades) and Mesha (Aries). In fact, the Solar year begins with the Sun’s entry into Aries (Mesha-Ram) [Puram.229:1-2]⁵.

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15. **Fire produced by Fire-drill:** There are many references about the fire produced by fire-drill. At one place, it is mentioned that fire is produced by an illiterate cowherd (Puram.331:4-5). As this description pertains to rural life, there must have been the prevalent of other fire-producing methods other than fire-drill. The spark produced by the friction of drill is used to produce fire striking it on the dry leaves (Agam.39:6-7). The fire produced by the fire-drill is kept growing by blowing through a pipe (Perum.178-79). There are people known as Erivalarppor, Mutti marabinar etc., who keep perpetual fires (Puam.2:23, 122:3, 397:20-21; Pari.5:42). The muttee (three fires) are Agavaniyam, Garukapatyam and Dashinagniyam represented by square, semi-circle and triangle. Surprisingly, in the veri / veriyadal (bacchanalian dance), on the kalam (field or place) same type of geometrical figures are drawn spreading rice, baked rice, paddy etc known as pirappu (an offering) [Agam.98:9; Murugu.234]. In India, generally, fig (Asvattha) tree has been used for upper part i.e, stick and Sumi wood (Prosopis spicigem) for lower part i.e, block with cavity of fire-drill. But, in the literature, specific reference I made about bamboo fire-drill. Moreover, as other trees have also been mentioned as sacred with fiery characteristics, they might have also been used for the purpose. Badaga, Kanikar, Nayadi, Paniyan, Yanadi and other tribes produce fire by this method even today. Kadirs, Irula, Badaga and Andamanese use the flint and steel striking method. Paniyans use frictional or cutting method also. Adichanallur findings include Fire-pistons, therefore, blowing and filling in the fir-piston must have existed.

16. **Fire and Mountain:** The relation of fire with mountain must have been due to the fact of existence of volcano in the past. D. N. Wadia⁶ has noted that towards the close of cretaceous, a large part of the Indian Peninsula was affected by stupendous outburst of volcanic energy, resulting in eruption of a thick series of lava and associated pyroclastic materials. The fire produced in the mountains appears in the desert (Ingu.338:3). The mountain is so covered with flowers of silk cotton trees (Ilavam) that it appears, as if it is burning (Ibid). The reddish mountain is engulfed with the fire, as if it is surrounded with fire-creepers (Ingu.353:1). The fire that originated through the bamboo trees (by friction) spreads to entire hillsides by the heavy winds and the lengthy-creeper like flames enter the gaps of caves and stones of hills, thereby resulting in the explosion due to expansion (of stones) (Ingu.395:1-2). The darkness of the caves of the mountain is removed by the glowing lance (Agam.272:4-6). Lamps are lit on the top of hills (Agam.265:2-3). The reddish Himalayas appear as big flame (Agam.265:2-3). This description is intriguing as it is not known, when Himalayas were with red colour and then it was started to be covered with snow. After the period of summer with the scorching of forests, the hills are without falls, as there are no rains. At that time the lights are lit on the peaks of hills (during Karttigai) on the occasion of the great festival (Agam.185:10-11). Lightning lamps on the top of hills clearly proves the existence of fire-worship and the association of fire with the hills. Thus, Kundram, Varai, Malai etc., have always been associated with fire. Tiruvannamalai, Sabarimalai etc., stand proof for periodical or perpetual burning of fire on the mountains. As the ancient

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Tamils would have observed the live-volcanoes erupting and experienced the wrath of them, they replicate and worship such past-symbols in the present.

17. **Fire and Trees:** Fire and trees are closely related to each other. Each Tamil king or tribe has a sacred and Royal tree. To defeat one, symbolically, first the tree is brnt or cut down. Interestingly, there are many references about the burning down of trees, towns and granaries in army-action⁷. The practice of sowing millets, after burning down trees is also mentioned⁸. Forest-fires are also described⁹. During such burning process and operations, some trees might have escaped fro the ravages of fire standing against it. Such trees might have been considered sacred and divine, as even fire could not have done anything. Then, they start regarding that God / Goddess reside in the trees. Vanni (Suma tree), Kadambu, Banyan and other trees are thus considered divine.

18. **Fire and Flowers:** There has been an intimate relation between fire and lotus elaborately brought pout by the ancient Tamil poets¹⁰. The Reddish colour, the petals, their arrangement, resemblance with flames, origin from waters and other details are compared. The Kuvalai (Oleander), Alari (Indian willow), Vengai (ptercocarpus bilobus) and Kanthal (Gloriosa superba) have always been compared with the characteristics of fire. Thus, flowers are compared with fire, flames adding divinity to them and then, attributing to a particular God / Goddess with sacredness.

19. **Fire and Sur:** Sur is the goddess, variously mentioned¹¹, residing on the hills, at the sides of the hills, in the forests, springs, and trees. She has born of rains (Agam.303:5-6). She has been terrible and fearful forms; capable of assuming any form; affecting women and children; and is just like fire. There has been another Sur mentioned denoting to Surapadman, killed by Murugan. Though, the commentators imply killer as “Murugan”, the expressions used are Sey, reddish Vel, fiery Vel, one who has Vel and so on. Natrinai perhaps gives a clue to differentiate between the two Surs as noted above: The goddess (Anangu) who gives the water-falls resides in the hills; terrifying and fearful caves are there in such hills; like a lightning, the glowing lance shows the way in the caves driving darkness away with its light. This shows the slowly developing of Murugan myth by transferring Sey, the Red one into Muruga and Sur into Surapadma. The subjugation of Sur is further shown as follows: The spring with divinity falls from the hills; the Sur women dance according to the tune of the natural music produced by the water-falls adorning themselves with the garlands of Kuvalai and Kanthal (Natri.34:1-6).

20. **Fire and Anangu:** There has been another goddess “Anangu” mentioned repeatedly with the same characteristics as that of Sr. She resembles fire more than Sur¹². Besides the natural dwelling places, she has temple (Puram.247:4) and idol-form (Agam.159:5-6). This proves that she is attaining the status of Goddess with full-fledged worship. In the case of fire-drill, the drill is considered as male and the block with hole female. Similarly, in the deification of fire, Anangu might have been considered as “fire-goddess”. In fact, she has directly

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been compared with fire: Just like the fire produced by drilling in the wood is used to burn other fire-wood, she has become “Anangu” for her own town (as it would be burned down by the King, whom she refused to marry (Puram.349:6-7)).

21. Fire and Kollippavai: Kollippavai, literally means a goddess that kills. The Kolli hills are with high peaks (Agam.33:4); with many Jack fruit trees with their reddish roots (Ibid.213:15); and with pure water falls. The Deiva resides in the mountains creates an image of pavai with all natural traits, as if it moves with life (Agam.189:2-4). It is also mentioned that she has been created by the union of Bhuta (Agam.192:8-9). By the sides of such hills, stands the image / painting of Kollippavai with all her bewitching beauty and features, that cannot be disfigured or affected by the blowing, showering rains, shaking thunders, all other natural adversaries and the wrath of the entire world (Natri.201:5-11). Here, she equals the fire, perhaps attaining its character.

22. Fire and Se, Se Ey or Seyon: Se denotes Red colour. Sey or Se Ey connotes the Red one, juvenility, son, child, Mars and bamboo. Accordingly, Seyon means one with reddish colour with youth or with bull, thus implying Muruga or Shiva, however, both names are not found as such. Taking clue from Tolkappiyam, some commentators while interpreting Mayon, the Black One as Tirumal (Vishnu), started alluding that Seyon, the Red One as Murugan. This transition can be found in Tirumurugatruppadai itself, besides Paripadal. The former starts with a specific reference to sun-worship (Murugu.1-2) goes on to praise Seyon; the fiery and lengthy Vel (lance) that killed Sur (46); Se Ey with reddish lance with Sevvel (61); from the first face, many rays spread like flowers in the ears (206-70); he has Ram and peacock as Vahana (210); brought up by six women, implying six Kartigai women (255); son of God who resides under banyan tree (256); Son of Goddess of mountain (257); Son of “Kotravai” (258); Child of “Pazhaiyol”, the ancient Goddess (259); killer of mountain Kravuncha (266); the Red One – Se Ey (271); and killer of Sur (275). In Paripadal, the references are direct: he is born of fire (5:30-35); Analan (Agni) gives elephant (5:57-580, whereas, Gnaman (Yama) gives Ram! (61-62) and later, other known details are given faithfully. From the above, it can be noticed, in his metamorphosis from fire-god to Muruga, how Seyon is made to have the characters by having Reddish dress (Angi-another name for Agni), riding Ram and so on. In the case of Anangu, it is directly said that “Murugan is Anangu” and thus, straight away taking over Anangu by Seyon or Murugan (agam.98:10-muruganangena=murugu-anangu-ena), whereas Sur has been subjugated as explained above.

23. Veriyadal in Kalam: The worship of Sey, Se Ey or Seyon; murugu or Neduvel is always associated and accompanied with the following:

1. Kalam: the place is selected (Agam.98:14)
2. Pandar: a Pandal; is constructed (Agam.98:15)
3. Pirappu: Offerings of rice, baked rice, paddy etc., arranged in geometrical forms by ladies (Agam.98:9; Murugu.234).

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4. Pillar: Kadambu pillar erected and red rope tied
5. Kodi: (Murugu.225; 230-1).
a flag s tied in the Kadamba tree or hoisted in the pillar
6. Dress: (Agam.382:3; Murugu.237).
7. Garland: two cloths are worn (Murugu.230).
8. Music: garland of buds is adorned (Agam.22 & 382).
9. Songs: various musical instruments played producing din
10. Sacrifice: (Agam.98:14).
sung about Neduvel.
a goat is sacrificed and its blood is mixed with flour etc
11. Fire: (Agham.22:10); blood is sprinkled and so also turmeric
12. Time: mixed with water (Murugu.234).
fire is raised near the altar (Agam.138:16-18).
13. Velan: the veri / veriyadal (bacchanalian dance) starts by or
14. Oracle: around midnight and continues upto dawn (Ibid).
15. Veri: the priest, who performs the veri / veriyadal.
the changing of colour of the edible root (Natri.47:8).
16. Veriyadal: the disease supposedly caused by Anangu, Sur or
Murugu as predicted by the Velan to the mother of the
affected virgin.
thus, the dance is performed with all fun-fare

The first seven steps resemble that of a performance of yagna. Either, yagna developed after ritualization of fire-cult must have been incorporated these elements or they must have been a poor imitation of yagna. As Kalavelvi is also compared with yahna, both Kalavelvi and Verityadal, as for as fire-cult aspect is concerned, must have been the preservation of some ancient practice and it cannot be simply ignored as poetic myth, because of exaggerated comparison. Unlike Kalavelvi, Veriyadal is not at all compared with yagnas by the poets. However, the resemblance is significant. The sacrifice and sprinkling of blood imply fertility charm. Actually, the references about Veriyadal, the lady-love ridicules for the performance of Veriyadal and the hypocrisy of Velan, as she knows her position very well. In fact, the lover is visiting her stealthily as usual at the same time, when Veriyadal takes place. Therefore, it is understood that the women, who are supposed to have been affected or infected by Sur, Anangu, Murugu or Neduvel are pregnant in most cases.

24. **Kala velvi:** Two types of Velvis (Yagnas) are described: One performed at battle fields and another at yagnasalas. First, Kalavelvi is considered: the hearth is made of human heads; Kuvilam (Vilva-cratoeva religiosa) is used as fire wood; the soup is prepared with intestines etc., and mixed with the ladle mae by fixing skull to the stick of Vanni tree (Suma-prospis spicigera). Here, the related words used – Adupppu (hearth), Viragu (fire-wood), Vanni (Suma tree) and Vettu (Yagna) are all connected with fire. Yagna performed at yagnasala are compared with the glorious acts performed on the battle fields, in a similar manner (Puram.26:80=-11). This may also be the poetic garb of mentioning the actual yagnas performed by the kings like Rajasuyam.

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25. **Velvi (Yagna):** There have been many references about the actual yagnas performed. In fact, all the three Chera, Cola and Pandya kings performed many yagnas. The names of Cholan Rajasuyam vetta Perunkilli and Pandyan Palyagasalai Mudikudimi Pervazhudhiyan are self-explanatory. The references about these kings are considered to be very ancient of the extant Tamil literature dating back to c.300 BCE and even before, Copious description about Vedas, Six Angas (Vedangas), 21 types of yagnas, three fires, 14 types of cows through which required ghee is obtained and duties of Andanar is found (Agam.166). Yagnasalas, shape, two types of Ahuti etc., are mentioned. Parppar, Andanar, Arutozhilalar, Aravor, Marayavar, Muppirinulor, Irupirappalar, Vedhiyar, Munivar and other expressions are used to denote persons connected with the rituals of yagnas, Vedas and other fire-connected ceremonies depending upon their nature of duties performed.

26. **Fire – Creator and Destroyer:** The fire that is due to burning down of the cities of enemies rises to the skies like many Suns. It is like Uzhitti (Madangai-the great fire produced at the time of deluge) that brings an end to this world, supposed to have hidden under oceans (Vadavai – submarine fire: Padit.62:5-8). During deluge, to reduce the burden of the world (land), water spreads covering it with huge waves raising and darkness falls on it in such a way that none can even know the direction. Again, there will be light with the appearance of Sun and the Madangai Ti (Submarine fire) boils away the deluge waters (so that the land surfaces, life spring back on it) (Padit.72:10-15). This description signifies the cyclic appearance and disappearance of the land mass (with population) and the relation between the five natural elements. The importance of fire is also brought out, as it helps the world to appear again and so also life on it. Creation and destruction of fire are thus explained. The conscious recording of such phenomena by the ancient poets should be noted with significance.

27. **Archaeological Evidences for Fire-cult¹³:** The Neolithic culture of South India used burnished ochre-coloured ware including post-firing ochre painting. The pottery designs include triangles and wavy lines representing fire. Other fire connected descriptions are Lotus, Kanthal, Kuvalai and Vengai like floral designs. The paintings at Kupgal, Maski, Piklihal etc., include the long humped bulls (Bos Indicus) and Rams. The principal colour used is Red predominantly pigment based. All these are indicative of fire-cult. The presence of Copper and Gold ornaments proves the knowledge of metal working with fire under controlled temperatures.

27.1. The megalithic culture has abundant evidences for fire-cult. Ferrous and non-ferrous technology proves the extensive application of heat energy knowing its complete knowledge as evidenced by many excavated samples of tools, implements, vessels, jewelry etc. Tridents and lances found are associated with fire-cult, as they are connected with goddess-worship and Veriyadal. Iron bells also show the religious connection. The bronzes exhibit high degree of skill in metal working, include small cups, bowls, jars etc., with lids up to 9 inches. They

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are with triangular incised designs. The lids have animal motifs including cocks and sheep/ Rams with twisted horns are found on the bronze articles. Rectangular stone objects smeared with a thick coat of red ochre are also found. Pottery has the same designs as noted above. Three legged jars, vessels and small urns may represent fire-god, as Agni is supposed to have three legs. A Ram shaped sarcophagus has been found with detachable head portion. The cow shaped sarcophagus and elephant legged are also associated with fire-cult, as cow is connected with yagnas and elephant with Murugan and Analan (Agni). The terracotta figures also include Ram, sheep, unicorn, humped bulls, mother goddess. At some places polished stones are kept for worship considered as thunderbolts or missiles of fire-god and they are found even today in village temples.

27.2. For firing of pottery up to 800°C to 900°C temperature is required; for manufacture of glass of the order 1350-1500°C and ferrous and non-ferrous metal working up to 1800°C temperature required under controlled conditions. For getting different colours of beads, different chemicals must have been added. All these processes cannot be done without any facility of handling high temperature equipments. Copper wire and rings, gold ornaments, bronze articles etc., prove the intricate metal working and processes¹⁴.

27.3. The pre-historic rock paintings found in different parts of Tamilnadu (South Arcot, Coimbatore and Dharmapuri) dated back to c. 2500 BCE and painted in ochre-red colour have many fire related depictions. They clearly show the fire sacrifices and rituals, Veriyadal and fire-god¹⁵.

28. **Fire and Temple worship:** As times are changed so also Gods and connected rituals. As pure form of fire-worship has been regulated, only assimilated and modified worship is observed today. Without fire, perhaps, temple worship with rites, rituals and ceremonies, whether according to Vedas or otherwise cannot be thought of. Temple worship embodies all the religious and social aspects of human life. Not only theological principles, but also philosophical intricacies have been incorporated in it for the understanding of laymen with simplicity. Particularly, the Panchbhuta worship is revealed in day to day worship and traditional practices of the devotees:

1. Earth It is offered as such or in the form of holy ash, Kumkum etc., to be applied on the forehead with veneration.
2. Water Associating with each temple, there is a tank, river or some thirth (water source), in which the visiting devotees take bath, purifying themselves before entering the temples. Invariably, there will be an Agni thirth, besides other thirths. In fact, the tank itself is divided into different areas with presiding deities, where the area belonging to fire-god is significantly marked.
3. Fire As has been mentioned, fire forms the basis of every worship.

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Through fire only God is invoked. Different forms of lamps and lights of various sizes, shapes and metals not only arranged and kept, but also shown to the deity. Camphor-fire shown to deity is offered to the devotees for venerable acceptance.

4. Wind Chamras (fans) are waved to deity. God is invoked with mantras treating vayu (air).
5. Sky It is implied in the name “Kadavul” (One who is beyond comprehension). Figuratively, empty space is shown to understand the nature.

29. **Inferences:** Traditionally, the direction and angle of Fire (Agni) is South-east. Therefore, the presence of fire-cult in that area of India is not exaggerated. Geologically, the Southern part of India is very old (and has been due to volcanic action) than the north. The fire-cult must have been also been the oldest of any civilization, heritage, culture and tradition, because of its association with the man from the beginning. The fire-worship must have been developed later with the ritualization of the cult. The worship can be considered under naturalistic, Theriomorphic, anthromorphic, fetishistic and symbolic forms.

1. Naturalistic: Fire worshipped s such connecting it with the Sun, Moon, stars, other planets like Mars, mountain, waters etc.,
2. Theriomorphic: Ram, lephant (as vahanas of fire-god, Muruga), cattle connected with yagna and Sun.
3. Anthropomorphic: Se, Se Ey, Seyon, Shive – Masculine form.
Sur, Anangu, Kollippavai, Arunthathi, Salini, Pattini,, Kotravai, Kadukizhal, Pazhaiyol, Ayirai etc., - Feminine form.
The personification of fire led to ultimate deification. Recognizing the natural phenomenon, such process must have been in turn divided into masculine and feminine forms. In the course of time, the combination and permutation of masculine and feminine natures led to further multiplication and unification of Gods and Goddesses depending upon the nature, geographical location of the place, availability of natural resources and so on.
4. Fetishistic:

Literally evidences of idols – of Anangu (Agam.159:5-6); Pattini (Padit.Padigam.5:4); Kollippavai (Natri.201:5-11, 192:8-9, 185:11); Pavai (Ingu.221);

Image of gold (Agam.212:1, Madu.410; Natri.192:8: a Pandya king seizes an image from Musiri after a war

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- (Agam.149:12), manufacture of an Idol (Madu.723-74). According to Agama sastra, the image of Fire-god (Agni) should be there in the south-east among the Parivara deities and in Gopuras. Agni is found in the gopuras of Darasuram and Kailasanatha temples. In Tiruppugalur, there is one Agni idol with two heads, six eyes, seven tongues, four horns, big belly and three legs. In Chennimalai temple, God Muruga has two heads and is known as Agneswaran.
5. Symbolic:

Fire is symbolically represented by triangles, wavy lines to denote flames and fire-pits; Swastika and Om are indirect representations. The three fires Agvaniyam, Garukapatyam and Dakshinagni are represented by square, semi-circle and triangle. In temples, southern quarters contain homasthana (the place for yagna) with nityagnigunta (perpetual fire-pit) for agnicarya (the daily fire sacrifices).

30. **Conclusions:** In view of the above literary, archaeological and other evidences presented, discussed and explained, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Fire-cult is one of the earliest forms of worship of the ancient Tamils.
2. Formation of fire-god concept and his characteristics may be unique and independently developed.
3. Ritualization of fire-cult led to the yagna oriented sacrifices. Veriyadal may be the reminiscence of such cult and Kalavelvi an imitation.
4. The technical advancement and capacity of handling temperatures of the order of 1500 to 1800°C may upset the Neolithic and megalithic barriers.
5. Anthropomorphic form of fire-cult in both masculine and feminine nature led to the origin of pantheistic mode of worship with increasing Gods and Goddesses.
6. Masculine forms of fire-god are Se, Se Ey, Seyon, Sevel, Neduvel etc.
7. Feminine form of fire-god (goddesses) are Sur, Anangu, Kollippavai, Arunthathi, Salini, Surara magalir, Varaiyara magilar, Vanara magalir, Kotravai, Pazhaiyol, Kaduraikkadavul, Oru mulai arutta Tiruma unni, Pattini, Sapta kanniyar and so on. The lengthy list of goddesses proves the continuous popularity of them not only in earlier times, but also today.

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8. The concept of Kodinilai, Kandazhi and Valli is unique in the fire-cult of the ancient Tamils leading to other philosophical musings.
9. The change and interchange of anthropomorphic worship is noted in the case of fire-god to Se, Se Ey or Seyon; Anangu or Sur to Seyon; Seyon as the son of the combination of the God residing under Banyan tree and Kotravai.
10. The above evidences show that Anangu, Sur and Sey were cast into crucible after synthesizing and reconciling the characters to bring out Murugu an Murugan.
11. The attribution and comparison of fiery characteristics to and with Stars, Planets and Gods form the basis of development of theology.
12. The fire representing words might have been developed in representing such factors, as they have different meanings including fire and characters of fire and stars and planets.
13. Temple worship embodies every aspect of fire physically, philosophically and theologically.
14. Fire-cult is explicit in rural areas, but implicit in urban areas. Fire-walking ceremony may be the left-out practice of Sati in a new garb, as in the literature itself exemption in the form of Kaimmai nonbu was given to widows.
15. Modified forms of fire-related festivals are Bhogi, Pongal, Holi, Rathyatras, Deepavali and Karttigai. Tiruvannamalai, Sabarimalai etc., stand proof for periodical burnings on the hills.

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Notes and References

1. For convenience, the important literary references are given in the brackets at the end of a sentence or sentences.

The abbreviations used for each work is as follows:

Tolkappiyam - Tol

Ettuttogai

1. Natrinai - Natri.
2. Kuruntogai - Kuru.
3. Ingurunuru - Ingu.
4. Paditruppattu - Padit.
5. Paripadal - Pari.
6. Kalittogai - Kali.
7. Agananuru - A gam.
8. Purananuru - Puram.

Pattuppattu

1. Tirumurugatruppandai.
2. Porunatruppandai.
3. Sirupanatruppandai.
4. Perumbanatruppandai.
5. Mullaippattu.
6. Maduraikanchi.
7. Nedunalvada.
8. Kurinchipattu.
9. Pattinapattu.
10. Malaipadukadam.

2. The term 'Shiva' is not found in the "Sangam" literature, but in Tevaam, Tiruvacagam etc., of 7th – 8th century works. As a part of continuation of masculine form of fire-worship, the crematory grounds which were supposed to be the dwelling places of Shiva might have been converted into temples. Tirukkollikkadu, Tiruthalaichangadu, Tiruttalaiyalangadu, Tiruvanniyur, Tiruvelvikkudi – names clearly prove the connection of fire-worship of one form or the other. Even the presiding deities have the appellations of fire e.g, Tiyadiappar, Angneswarar etc.
3. Tolkappiyam makes a specific reference about virtuous wife entering into the flames of the funeral pyre of her husband (Tol.Porul.Purat.79). When Chera and Chola kings died fighting, their wives performed Sati (Puram.62:13-16). Other references are - Ay Aindiran and his wives (Puram.240); Perungoppendu (Puram.246 & 247); request for manufacture of big crematory urn to bury along with her husband (Puram.256); a widow prepares to die rather than to follow Kaimmai (Puram.280); a monkey performs Sati (Kuru.69). For full details see the following reference:

K. V. Ramakrishna Rao, ***Sati in the Ancient Tamil Literature***, A paper presented at South Indian History Congress held at Calicut from February 1-3, 1991.

4. Ursa major / the Great Bear / Saptarishi are group of bright stars near Pole Star. The star Mizar / Vasistha accompanied by a faint star Alcor / Arunthathi are thus considered with significance.

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5. In Indian astronomy, it is stated that the Pleiades or the Krittika group of stars is presided over by Fire or Agni and that when the Sun in its annual motion passes over this group, it will be very hot, rather the hottest part of the year.
6. D. N. Wadia, ***Geology of India***, Tata McGraw Hill, New Delhi, 1981, p.275. Such great volcanic formation is known as “Deccan traps”.
7. Puram.6:22, 7:7-8, 16:17, 344:5; Padit.20:18-20; Padit.Padigam.3, 48:10, 71:9; Natri.14:5.
8. Agam.288:4-5, 368:1-2.
9. Agam.103; Ingu.376:2; Padit.25:6-7, 40:28-30.
10. Agam.106:1, 191:2; Porun.159; Perum.289-90; Madu.249; Padit.67:19-21; Natri.310:1, 379:3-4; Puram.246 & 247.
11. Sur on the hills – Agam.303:5-6; Ingu.249:4; hill sides – Natri.359:9; Kuru.376:2, 105:5; Agam.158:8-9, 22:1, 354:11; springs – Agam.188:14-17, 91:4; forests – Murugu.41; trees-Agam.297:10-11; born of rains-Agam.303:5-6.
12. The characteristics of Anangu: affecting and infecting – Agam.7:4; like God in the sky – Agam.16:17-18, 376:10; Padit.44:13, 79:14, 31:35; resides in the hills – Agam.22:1, 158:8-9, 266:18, 272:3; on the top of the hills-Agam.198:14-16; Natri.165:2; like a disease-Natri.34:8, 282:5, 322:9-10, 376:10; Ingu.53:1, 363:4; of waters-Agam.207:1, 156:15, 240:8; Natri.155:6; Ingu.174:1, 28:1, 53:1. with bewitching beauty-Padit.68:19; fear-Padit.1:12, 11:4; of great strength-Padit.62:11, of trees-Padit.88:6.
13. Based on the reports of ***Indian Archaeology – A Review***, published by the Archaeological Survey of India.
14. Metals / alloys and their melting points in brackets are given to appreciate the controlled temperature handling capacity of the ancient Tamils: Brass (1030°C), Bronze (1030°C), Copper (1090°C), Gold (1070°C), Iron-pure (1540°C), cast Iron-grey (1230°C), cast white (1150°C), wrought (1640°C), Glass-crown (1130°C), Glass flint (1230°C), maintenance of molten state of glass (1350-1500°C).
15. The pre-historic rock paintings dated to the period before c.2500 BCE have been reported by the Tamilnadu Archaeological Department as detailed below:

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| Place | Figures found related to fire | Interpretation |
|---|---|--|
| Kizhvalai (between Vizhppuram and Tiruvannamalai, South Arcot District) | Triangles, rays with circle. A man holding horse-bite and another sitting on it. | Fie / homagunda, flames, Sun. King / chief observing the fire / Sun related ritual. |
| Settavarai (3 kms from Vettavalam, S.A). | Lengthy pillar Flames below such pillar like structure. Bullocks, boar, fish | Pillar constructed at kalam / yagnasala. Fire / yagnagunda / altar. Indicates surrounding forests and nearby water source. Thus, represents a fire ritual / sacrifice. |
| Alampadi (18 kms from Tirukkivilur, S.A). | Bull, fish, peacock, boar, rhinoceros Mask like figure Fire with flames. | Indicates forest location with nearby water source. The priest may be wearing a mask or it represents a priest or some deity. Kalam / yagnakunda with fire. Even, if they represent leathers kept for drying, the combination indicates a fire-related ritual conducted in forest. |
| Vettaikkaran hills (25 kms from Coimbatore). | A warrior on the horse back; Manstanding in a row; Another man on elephant. | A king / chief may be attending a ritual. |
| Angananachi malai, Maharaja kadaiu, near Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri District., dated to 550-500 BCE paintings found on the megalithic rock beds below hills. | A circle (slightly elliptical) drawn surrounding a figure, leaving more space on the head small lines emanating fro the circle. | 1. Elliptical circle – pyre / yagnagunda. Lines flames / rays. Figure – a god / goddess or a woman entering fire / a man on the pyre. 2. Fire / Sun God. 3. Any God / Goddess with halo. |